



IN TOUCH

Protecting Children Online

Children gaining access to objectionable web sites concerns many parents. Millions of web pages market sexual material, promote drug abuse, advertise hate groups and more. Seventy percent of children doing homework online have stumbled onto sexually explicit web sites, according to cyber watchdog ProtectKids.com. Even the best Internet filter software tested by Consumer Reports (AOL's Parental Controls) was only moderately successful at blocking objectionable sites. Off-the-shelf software includes Cybersitter, Cyber Patrol, and Cyber Snoop. A variety of useful features among filter software include the ability to track sites visited, monitor downloads, control time-of-day access and more. View almost every filter program available at www.GetNetWise.org.

Assertiveness

Is a coworker's behavior stressing you out? Have you told others around you about it, dropped hints to your coworker to stop, but are still hoping for a change? The problem may be that you haven't tried a truly assertive approach. Resistance to being assertive explains the existence of many coworker conflicts and why they grow worse. The assertive approach frequently requires that you be more vulnerable, which explains its lack of popularity.

But the payoff is less stress, improved productivity and better morale. Example: Imagine a coworker making "put-downs" about you in staff meetings on a regular basis. Would you try an assertive approach like this: "I find it terribly embarrassing to be criticized in front of others. If you feel I should be doing a better job, can you please discuss it with me in private?"

To be assertive, rather than passive or aggressive, follow the A.S.S.E.R.T. formula:

A is for ATTENTION. The first step in being assertive is to get the other person's attention so they will listen to you.

S is for SOON, SIMPLE, SHORT. Don't delay in being assertive. Assertiveness can become awkward and difficult the longer you wait. Stay brief and to the point.

S is for SPECIFIC BEHAVIOR. Focus on the behavior that compromised your rights, not the person.

E is for EFFECT ON ME. Describe the effect of the other person's behavior on you.

R is for RESPONSE. Say what you want changed or different.

T is for TERMS. Make an agreement with the other person about how to treat you differently in the future.



Helping people lead healthier lives

Portions of this article were adapted from *Fighting Invisible Tigers: A Stress Management Guide for Teens* (Revisited & Updated) by Earl Hipp © 1995. Used with permission from Free Spirit Publishing, Inc. Minneapolis, MN; 1-866-703-7322; www.freespirit.com. All rights reserved.

Health, Stress & Mindfulness

Stress and Illness

Stress and stress-related illnesses have become a major focus among health care providers today. Some people consider the high levels of stress many people live with to be an epidemic in today's society. It is widely acknowledged by most people in health care, that many (more than half) of the complaints that people bring to their primary health care providers are either caused or exacerbated by stress. Examples that come immediately to mind are: headaches, non-specific aches and pains, some gastrointestinal disorders, symptoms of panic and anxiety, high blood pressure, insomnia, asthma.

“Fix it for me doctor” or Health Care as a Three-Legged Stool

People often go to medical doctors with problems that might be better addressed by changes in belief, behavior or health-related habits, than by medication or surgery. Think, for example, of the relationship between what we eat and blood sugar levels; or between anger and blood pressure. Dr. Herbert Benson, MD, the Director of the Mind Body Medical Institute at Harvard Medical School states that medical care can be visualized as a three-legged stool. One leg of the stool is pharmacology/drugs; the second leg is surgical intervention. The third leg of the stool is self-care. Self care refers to things a person can do for him/herself, having to do with: food and nutrition, positive social interaction, exercise, spiritual practice.

Once we accept that stress can indeed make us sick, or at least sicker, we have to wonder “OK, then, what can I DO about that?” Our lives ARE stressful, and a lot of the causes of stress (the “stressors”) cannot be eliminated. So then, what's a “stressed out” person to do? The answer ironically is: NOTHING. But a different type of nothing than what you are used to thinking about. This kind of “nothing” involves an

intentional practice of self-quieting. It's not the kind of “doing nothing” we do when “zoned out” on television.

Treating the “Body/Mind”

“Behavioral Medicine,” a subspecialty in health care first formally recognized in 1977, pays explicit attention to the fact that mind and body are one system, not two separate entities. Behavioral medicine addresses one's mind/body: thoughts, feelings and behaviors as they affect a person's overall health and wellbeing. It goes beyond the signs and symptoms of disease to address the total functioning of the person. Thus, if you think you are stressed, and feel stressed, your body's internal mechanisms are going to be reacting accordingly. If you think and feel emotionally anxious, your body is simultaneously responding with a very specific biochemical reaction that is going to further contribute to your experience of anxiety: racing heart, shortness of breath, sweaty palms, etc.

Don't Just Do Something, Sit There!

There is a growing movement within the health care community sometimes referred to as “participatory medicine” that actively involves people in their own healing process. This movement encompasses practices like “Mindfulness Meditation” (Jon Kabat-Zinn, 1990) and “Relaxation Response” (Herbert Benson, 1975) (see websites listed at the end of this article) which are both ways of intentionally quieting the body/mind, slowing down physiologically, and developing the ability to pay attention to moment-to-moment experiences, as opposed to having one's mind racing around in past or future events. At the various stress reduction clinics and “mind/body medical clinics” in existence, people are taught the art of simply paying attention, moment to moment, to their experience, while breathing in a relaxed manner; “nowhere to go, nothing to do.”

continued

The scientific evidence on the benefits of this type of activity (or non-activity), along with gentle stretching or other body awareness practices like Tai Chi or Yoga has been growing tremendously in the past several decades. Well-designed experiments have found that people who do these sorts of practices on a regular and disciplined basis often experience multiple benefits. To list just a few of the findings:

- People suffering from chronic pain have experienced improved mood and a lowering of distress.
- Patients with fibromyalgia (a disorder causing pain, tenderness and stiffness in the muscles) have experienced less pain, improved sleep.
- People with Generalized Anxiety Disorder have reduced symptoms and reduced their use of medication.
- People undergoing treatment for psoriasis have only needed one quarter of the amount of the usual prescription drug.
- Cancer patients experienced improved sleep and optimism, and overall quality of life.

Try It Out

You can do a little personal experiment with the Relaxation Response on your own. Give yourself half an hour in a quiet place and do the following:

- 1) Sit quietly in a comfortable position.
- 2) Close your eyes, or leave them part way open if you prefer, but without focusing on anything.
- 3) Breathing through your nose if possible, turn your attention to your breath. Develop a focus on a word or phrase that you can return to when your mind wanders away from your breath, and into past or future concerns. Some people like to imagine breathing in peace and breathing out stress or tension, others like to use a section of a prayer or line of poetry.
- 4) As you are breathing, imagine moving your attention over your body from the tips of your

toes to the top of your head. What are you aware of? Notice the various sensations in the different parts of your body. If you become aware of tension anywhere, simply breathe into that part of your body and invite it to relax as you exhale. Imagine the tension leaving each time you breathe out.

- 5) Continue this practice for 10-20 minutes.

To Learn More

www.mbmi.com (Harvard University Mind Body Medical Institute)
www.umass.med.edu/cfm (University of Massachusetts Medical School, Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society)
Full Catastrophe Living, Jon Kabat-Zinn
Relaxation Response, Herbert Benson
Minding the Body, Mending the Mind, Joan Borysenko

by Nancy Seldin, MPH, EdD

Family Mediation Avoids the Mean

Although the process of divorce is adversarial, you have a good chance of avoiding the anger, hostility, expense and impact on your children if you include family mediation in your attempts to arrive at a divorce agreement. A trained mediator plays a neutral role in helping separated or divorced couples make their own, mutually agreeable decisions about children, finances and property. Conflicts you thought unsolvable may be answered through mediation. Professional mediation can save you the expense and loss of control over your life that can come with a court battle. Mediators say children whose parents reached an agreement through mediation are happier, more secure and less stressed. Check your local listings or talk to your EAP about resources in your area.

Problem Solving Formula

Most problem solving is subconscious and automatic, but more complex problems depend upon conscious, rational thought that follows a formula to find the best solution. Here is one of the most accepted problem solving formulas:

- **Define the Problem.** Decide what you want to achieve and write it down. Ask yourself, "How will I know that my problem is solved? What evidence will exist to demonstrate it?" Get the vague idea out of your head and down on paper. Writing the problem down forces you to think about what you are trying to solve.
- **Analyze the Problem.** Potential solutions arise from investigating a problem in all its aspects. Ask how the problem originated. When did it start? What maintains it? What would happen if it was solved, or not solved? Who or what contributes to the problem, and how? Confirm after this step that your problem is correctly defined.
- **Generate Possible Solutions.** Develop as many solutions as possible without evaluating them at this point.
- **Analyze Solutions.** Investigate each solution for its ability to produce the desired outcome. Make a list of advantages and disadvantages for each proposed solution. The process of writing advantages and disadvantages produces additional insight.
- **Select the Best Solution.** Look at your list and begin discarding solutions according to the advantages and disadvantages assigned to each. Based on facts and figures, or intuition, choose a solution. If you end up with no solution, consider clarifying and better defining the problem.

To speak with an EAP professional,
please call:

800.765.0770